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ABSTRACT

Adolescent stress has been associated with serious health consequences and the need for mental health professionals to engage with adolescents as these young people strive to develop healthy lifestyles has never been more critical. To meet this need, an efficient measure of hassles in the junior high school population was developed to provide practitioners and researchers with an efficient measure which produces valid and reliable data. The development of this instrument--the Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (APES)--is reported along with some modifications to the scale so as to make it more useful to researchers. Although APES has been shown to produce both reliable and valid scores, its 202 items make the scale time consuming when conducting research or when using it in an applied setting. APES assesses hassles in five content domains, yet research has shown that the areas of peer, school, and family hassles are of greatest concern to the early adolescent. Using only these three domains, APES was modified into a 34-item measure. This measure was then administered to 406 junior high school students. Scores on the revised and shortened version of the APES were found to be both reliable and valid. Contains 21 references. (MKA)

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Promoting the Healthy Adolescent Through Early Identification of Daily Hassles

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Abstract

Adolescent stress has been associated with serious health consequences, and the need for mental health professionals to engage with adolescents as they strive to develop healthy lifestyles has never been more critical. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide practitioners and researchers with an efficient measure of hassles in the junior high school population, which produces valid and reliable data. The Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (APES) (Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987) is a measure of daily hassles which has been shown to produce both reliable and valid scores. Unfortunately, the APES consists of 202 items making the scale very time consuming when conducting research or when using in an applied setting. The APES assesses hassles in five content domains, yet research has shown the areas of peer, school, and family hassles to be of greatest concern to the early adolescent. Using only these three domains, the present study modified the APES into a 34 item measure. Scores on the revised and shortened version of the APES were found to be both reliable (coefficient alphas ranged from .79 to .91) and valid (correlations ranged from .30 to .41 with a measure of symptomatology).

Promoting the Healthy Adolescent Through Early Identification of Daily Hassles.

Over the years, numerous studies have shown adolescent stress to be associated with serious health consequences (Wagner, Compas, & Howell, 1988; Vaux & Ruggiero, 1983; Gad & Johnson, 1980; Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980; Duncan, 1977). Presently, the stressors which are being studied most are major life events and daily hassles. Major life events are theorized to be stressful because they require immediate and considerable adjustments, whereas daily hassles are believed to be cumulative in their demands on the individual (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1978; Dohrenwend, Dohrenwend, Dodson, & Shrout, 1984; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986; Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980).

More recent attention, however, has been directed toward the impact of daily hassles on the health status of adolescents. Research which has utilized a measure of hassles and a measure of major life events has generally concluded that daily hassles is the superior predictor of psychological and physiological adaptation (Ham & Larson, 1990; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981; DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982; Wagner et al., 1988). One scale which purports to measure both daily hassles and major life events is the Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (APES) (Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987). On the APES, major life events and daily hassles are presented together. The daily hassles are classified into five major stress areas, which include network events, intimacy events, family events, peer events, and academic events. Separate scales were constructed for young adolescents (ages 12 - 14), middle adolescents (ages 15 - 17), and older adolescents (ages 18 - 20) to reflect the different issues which cause stress at various age levels.

The middle adolescent version of the APES consists of 202 items which are measured on three nine point scales. The first scale addresses the desirability of an event. The second scale measures perceived impact of a stressor, and the third

scale assesses the frequency of which each perceived stressor occurs. Events perceived to have high impact but which occur infrequently are classified as major life events, whereas events with variable impact that occur frequently are determined to be daily hassles. Test-retest reliability studies conducted on the scores of the middle adolescent scale were found to be adequate. Compas et al. (1987) determined the test-retest reliability of the data by correlating the number of events that were reported at two points in time (2 weeks apart), and by calculating the consistency of reports on the occurrence of individual items. In addition, Compas et al. (1987) determined the percentage of agreement for the cognitive appraisals of stressful events, such as desirability, impact, and frequency. For the number of events reported on the studied samples, Pearson correlation coefficients were found to be .81 for positive weighted events, .89 for negative weighted events, and .84 for the total number of events reported over a two week interval. The percentage of agreement for reports of the occurrence of events was 84% at the two time frames. Finally, the percentages of agreement for subjects' cognitive appraisals ranged from adequate to high; the rating of desirability was at 92% agreement, the rating of impact was 77%, and the rating of frequency was 90% agreement at the two time intervals.

Unfortunately, the administration of a 202 item measure can be very time consuming when conducting research and almost prohibitive in an applied setting. Further, several studies have found school, family, and difficulties with friends to be the areas that most concern adolescents (Armacost, 1989; Glynn, 1981; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984; Stark, Spirito, Williams, & Guevermont, 1989; Stern & Zevon, 1990). These findings cast doubt on the necessity of assessing daily hassles in the five proposed categories on the APES. Due to the time consuming nature of the scale, and the above findings, it is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that school, family, and peer hassles can be assessed in a reliable and valid manner by modifying the "middle" version of the APES.

Method

Participants

Junior high school students in a moderately sized mid-western community were given the opportunity to participate in the study. From the original sample, 406 students completed all of the instruments in the study; 203 were male and 203 were female. Ages ranged from 13 to 16 years (mean age of 14.7 years), and the ethnic composition of the sample was 68% Anglo and 30% Hispanic; representative of this community.

Procedure

Once permission was granted from the University responsible for data collection, and the school district's administrative officers, consent forms had to be returned and signed by the guardian for the student to be allowed to participate in the study. The modified APES and the BHI-A Symptom Checklist (Bruns & Disorbio, 1988) were administered in group format. Group composition was never larger than 25 students.

For purposes of the study, the APES was modified in the following manner. Using the "middle" version as a model, two measurement experts independently selected negatively weighted hassle items that were clearly associated with school, home, and friends (domains identified in previous research as the areas of greatest concern for adolescents). Only those items that were selected by both experts were included in the measure used in the study. All other items were eliminated. The tested version of the instrument included 34 items/events (see Appendix A). Subjects were asked to identify whether the event had occurred within the past three months and then rate the level of hassle/stress on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Good or Not Bad through 5 = Extremely Bad.

The BHI-A Symptom Checklist comprises a list of 64 common psychosomatic symptoms in adolescents (alpha reliability for the normative sample = .96; .94 in this study), and was administered in its original form. The

scale is designed to measure the presence of and degree to which somatic symptoms are part of the respondent's experience. The underlying theory behind the BHI-A is that psychosomatic illness results from an inability to cope with stress and anxiety. Thus, psychosomatic symptoms are substituted for feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety (Bruns & Disorbio, 1988).

Results

The initial purpose of the study was to determine whether or not scores from a junior high sample would yield adequate internal consistency reliability for a modified version of the APES. In our study, the coefficient alpha obtained from the scores for the entire scale was .91, thus indicating a high degree of scale homogeneity. The coefficient alpha did not significantly increase as a consequence of an item deletion. The coefficient alphas obtained from the scores within the content domains of school (.79), family (.81), and peer (.79) also demonstrated a relatively high degree of scale homogeneity. Again, coefficient alphas from the scores in each content domain did not significantly increase as a consequence of an item deletion.

The second purpose of the study was to determine the criterion-related validity of the scores on the revised APES by correlating them with a measure of psychosomatic symptomatology (BHI-A). Scores from each content domain were significantly correlated with scores from the BHI-A at the .01 level and were only moderately correlated with one another. Results are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

The results of the study show that scores on a revised and shortened version of the APES can measure daily hassles at a reliable level and in a valid manner. In our sample, the internal consistency reliability of the data from the entire scale and from each content domain was relatively high. These findings

suggest that all items on the scale measure the same construct. Subscale internal consistency estimates from our sample were, as expected, lower than the entire scale primarily because subscale calculations are based on fewer items.

In order to help establish the criterion-related validity of the scores on the revised APES, the BHI-A was used as a criterion measure because past research has shown stress to be associated with physical health problems and psychosomatic symptoms (Bruns & Disorbio, 1988; Gad & Johnson, 1980; Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980). The findings of this study demonstrate that scores within each content domain of the revised APES are significantly related to scores on the measure of psychosomatic symptoms. The correlations from each content domain range from .30 to .41, which is consistent with past research that has shown stress to account for approximately 10% of the variance in symptomatology (Brown & Siegel, 1988; Roth & Holmes, 1985; Zeidner & Hammer, 1990). Interestingly, in this sample of eighth and ninth grade students, peer hassles were found to be the most predictive of symptomatology, whereas school hassles were found to be the least predictive.

In summary, the present study has shown that peer, family, and school hassles can be both reliably and validly obtained by using a 34 item, revised version of the APES. The revised APES is consistent with past research reporting school, family, and peer hassles to most concern adolescents. Compared to the original APES, the revised APES is a more convenient instrument for both the researcher and practitioner because it takes much less time to administer and score. Because adolescent stress is associated with serious health consequences, it is important to accurately assess daily hassles. The present study will provide researchers and practitioners with a potentially efficient, valid, and reliable manner of measuring hassles for a junior high school population, further enabling the mental health professional to engage with adolescents as they strive to develop healthy lifestyles.

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Table I: Correlations between scores on the modified APES scales and the BHI-A Symptom Checklist.

	Family	Peer	School	Symptoms
Family	-	.68	.66	.33
Peer		-	.68	.41
School			-	.30

Appendix A: The modified APES scale.

1. Doing things/spending time with family members. (F)
2. Dating or doing things with people of the opposite sex. (P)
3. Worry about performance in extracurricular activities (sports, etc.). (S)
4. Restrictions at home (having to be in at a certain time, etc.). (F)
5. Attending school. (S)
6. Hassles, arguments or fights with other students/peers. (P)
7. Getting bad grades or progress reports. (S)
8. Having bad classes or teachers. (S)
9. Worry about school performance. (S)
10. School interfering with other activities. (S)
11. Meeting new people. (P)
12. Friend getting married or engaged. (P)
13. Having few or no friends. (P)
14. Getting ready for school. (S)
15. Pressures or expectations by parents. (F)
16. Visiting a parent that does not live with you. (F)
17. Visiting with relatives. (F)
18. Making love or sexual intercourse. (P)
19. Friends getting drunk or using drugs. (P)
20. Obligations at home. (F)
21. Change in privileges or responsibilities at home. (F)
22. Change in number of friends. (P)
23. Not spending enough time with family members. (F)
24. Not spending enough time with friends. (P)
25. Living with only one parent. (F)
26. Homework or studying. (S)
27. Taking care of younger brothers or sisters. (F)
28. Spending time at home. (F)

29. Doing household chores. (F)
30. Having teachers favor other students. (S)
31. Not getting along with parents of friends. (P)
32. Getting punished by parents. (F)
33. Being in love or in a relationship. (P)
34. Not having a boyfriend/girlfriend. (P)

**F = family hassles, P = peer hassles, S = school hassles